

# Theodore Roosevelt—Friend of All Real Men

## A Close-Up of the Colonel By His Private Secretary

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His Confidential Secretary From November, 1916, to January, 1919

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This is the second and final instalment  
of Miss Stricker's article

COLONEL ROOSEVELT demanded efficiency from others, and accuracy he considered a synonym for efficiency. "I have worked under some of the greatest editors in the country," said a newspaper man who was one of his aids, "but never have I seen a man so insistent on absolute accuracy." This devotion to "accuracy" involved him in several epistolary debates, especially with lovers of nature, who might in their letters make a mistake in the classification of a bird, or a reptile, or even might question the correctness of his classification of some beast or fowl. His percentage of errors was far lower than those who took issue with him.

I remember only once that he "checked up" his memory and on that occasion it was to verify the exact wording of something in connection with The Hague Treaty. His memory of the sentence was exactly right. His mail was not classified, but each letter was answered as it came along in his pile, and ranged from early Bible day topics—to be more exact, from Creation—to the present day, politics of all ages, history in all its branches, poetry, reforms of every variety, athletics in all its branches, especially boxing and wrestling. The list, indeed, ran from Agriculture through the alphabet to Zoology, save and except any appreciable amount on finances, on which point Colonel Roosevelt professed himself a novice.

I recall very vividly an incident, which made me wish most heartily that he had never taken more than a passing interest in snakes. One day, upon my arrival at Sagamore Hill, Colonel Roosevelt was busy with a caller in the renowned North Room. I went immediately to the library, put my things in readiness for instant attention the moment Colonel Roosevelt should arrive. In quickly laying out my work I did not notice a large glass jar on the desk (longside of the silver horseshoe penholder stand, presented by Bob Fitzsimmons, and just behind the elephant hoof inkwell), containing a snake in alcohol, until I started around the desk to lower the shade at the west window. I'll warrant no one ever moved as fast in that historic mansion as I did when I saw the snake. I regained my equilibrium in a moment or two, and shortly afterward, when Colonel Roosevelt arrived, the first letter he dictated was to the sender of the snake, identifying its species and telling him it was a non-poisonous variety.

Concentration, also, he considered a large part of efficiency, and he early trained his mind to concentrate on the subject before him at the moment. In his travels he read almost continuously and closed his mind to everything in the world but the book in his hand. Yet it appeared that nothing escaped his subconscious notice. Absorbed in a book, he still noted the beauties of the scenery and could describe it later with the same thoroughness as the subject of which he had read; which may indicate to some minds that concentration is no mean part of mental versatility.

His foresight, too, was uncanny. "He can see around corners which the rest of us won't reach in our travels for five years," said one man who had studied Colonel Roosevelt. And yet he was patient with the men who were five years behind him. Nor was this foresight confined to politics, but embraced economic questions and conditions, as well as international affairs. So, foreseeing things to which most men were blind, he was able to prepare far in advance for emergencies or contingencies and to settle profound, important questions with a promptness which led many to believe him to be impulsive, or prone to act on the spur of the moment.

As a matter of fact, impulsiveness in Colonel Roosevelt was confined chiefly to his generosity; his great heart leaped immediately to the relief of the unfortunate, while his mind in other lines gave deep consideration to a subject before he spoke or acted. Nor was he the intense radical that many persons believed him; rather was he conservative by nature and by habit of thought. But he was so far in advance of many minds, even great minds of his day, that he reached points in the world's progress long before they did, and sometimes had to wait for them to catch up, thus engendering the belief that he was radical, when in reality he was only farsighted and ahead of the times.

### Truly Democratic

A more democratic man than Theodore Roosevelt never lived. He "held these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," and these rights, individual and collective, he respected and insisted that others also respect. One of his real pleasures was to attend a communication of his Masonic lodge and to sit in a general seat while his gardener or some other man of modest estate presided as master. His circle of real friends, as distinguished from acquaintances, embraced all sorts and conditions of men, from kings and princes to cowboys—or, cowboys to kings and princes, as you will. To him, re-



Colonel Roosevelt and one of his grandchildren

ligion was religion, and he knew no doctrinal or denominational distinctions among men.

When he was President he appointed a colored man as Collector of the Port of Charleston, and entertained Booker Washington at luncheon, both actions bringing down on him a storm of critical denunciation from some elements—to which he was impervious. Visitors at Sagamore Hill and at the Colonel's office ranged from men of highest and greatest stations in life, in this country and abroad, to those far less fortunate; I have seen a prize fighter and an emissary of a foreign power, for instance, call within a few minutes of each other. He was a prize fighter with the pugilist and a diplomat with the foreign visitor.

Appealed to as he was by the peoples of practically all nations for help and advice in their problems during the world war, and suffering as he did because of his inability in most instances to extend the assistance which he, and apparently he alone, could render, his interest never flagged in any of the branches of life.

### Knowledge of Birds

He took deep interest in the feathered inhabitants of Long Island, even to providing a luncheon table on the Roosevelt estate for the birds, so that they should not suffer when food was not plentiful for them. But, after all, his knowledge of Long Island birds, while natural, seemed insignificant compared with his knowledge of birds of other ages and climes. Some of the readers may have seen published the letter he wrote to Mr. Beebe, of the New York Zoo, just one week before his death. I quote it herewith for those who did not see it:

"Dear Beebe: I have read your really wonderful volume and I am writing Colonel Kuster about it. I cannot speak too highly of the work. Now, a question: On page XXIII, final paragraph, there is an obviously incorrect sentence, about which I formerly spoke to you. Ought you not call attention to it and correct it in the second volume? In it you say, by inference, that the grouse of the Old World and the grouse of the New World are in separate families, although I believe all three of the genera and one of the species are identical. Moreover, you say that the family of pheasants include not only the pheasants, but the partridges and quail of the New World, further-

more red-legged partridges and francolins, which, of course, you have already included in the term of partridge and quail of the Old World. Obviously some one has made a mistake and I cannot even form a guess of what was originally intended. Do you mind telling me and I can say in my review that this slip of the printer will be corrected in some subsequent edition. Faithfully yours, T. R."

### His Wonderful Patience

I never knew Colonel Roosevelt to be irritable or peevish. He frequently said, laughingly, "I have a very bad temper, but I keep it under excellent control!" His patience was tried to the limit, but it was wonderful. For instance, foolish people, who could perfectly well have found out by other means without troubling him, would write and say a political foe had almost convinced the writer that the Rough Riders had been saved at San Juan by a negro regiment. The following extract from a letter in reply to such inquiry is self-explanatory:

"If you will turn to my Autobiography you will read the letters of my commanding officers, and of the regular army officers who served with me or under me, recommending me for a medal of honor for gallantry and efficiency in leading my men in the San Juan battle. I commanded my regiment throughout the fighting in which one-third of its officers and one-fifth of its enlisted men were killed or wounded. But toward the end of the day I commanded all of cavalry division at the extreme fighting front, including regulars and volunteers—white troops and colored troops. All you have to do, or that any one has to do, is at the nearest public library to get my Autobiography and look at the copies of the official letters I give and the quotations from the official files at Washington. There is no chance of any man being mistaken when he makes any assertion such as those your correspondent makes. He is not mistaken at all. He is deliberately and wilfully falsifying the facts to suit his own purposes."

### A Letter

Other foolish people tried to question his article in "The Outlook" at the beginning of the war. It was easy to understand Colonel Roosevelt's position, if one took the trouble to follow his utterances. For those who may not know I am quoting the following extract from a

letter, sent in reply to such inquiry: "For the first sixty days after the war was declared I loyally and in good faith endeavored to support President Wilson, accepting his assurances that it was our duty to be absolutely neutral, and accepting the statements (issued in justification of his conduct from Washington) that there were circumstances known to the President which rendered him able to say that there had been no wrong committed in Belgium by Germany, of a kind that warranted even protest from us, and that substantially the different warring nations did not show such variation of conduct as warranted from us any attitude save one of neutrality and good will toward all."

"I took this attitude partly because at the outset of such a struggle it is always well to support the President as long as possible, and partly because of the repeated and explicit official and semi-official statements from Washington as to the President's peculiar knowledge of the situation and of the justification for his attitude afforded by this knowledge.

"In thus supporting the President I was actuated by proper purposes. But slowly and reluctantly I was driven to the conclusion that he was not entitled to this support, and that I was in error in having given it. Finally, about October 1, I saw members of the Belgium Mission to the United States. I got full and first-hand information from them. I corroborated it by inquiries from other sources. I examined The Hague conventions for myself, and I came to the conclusion that I had been in error in supporting the President; that I had been misled by him and it was my duty to oppose him.

"I then took the position which I still hold. At first, practically no man of national reputation took this position excepting myself. I was very violently assailed for taking it and for not standing by the President. Gradually, more and more people took my views and on most of the important points the President later reversed himself and took the position I had taken, although in each case from six months to three years later.

"Then when events had shown that I was right, foolish or dishonest persons assailed me because for the first sixty days of the war I had followed the President. I admit it was an error and I will add that the only errors I committed as regards the war and so far as the President is concerned were on the occasions when I supported him. I

never erred on the far more numerous occasions when I opposed him; but I always endeavored to give him the benefit of the doubt and I sometimes erred in doing so."

### Love of Children

During the last year some of his grandchildren were always at Sagamore Hill. Even in his busiest moments he seemed to sense the arrival of the children, as they were brought in at sundown. He would rush out into the hall, dictating on the way, snatch the baby from the nurse and almost devour her. The little pink bundle was always brought into the library for admiration. On one occasion it occurred to small Richard that the baby was getting more than her share of attention, and much to the Colonel's amusement he very soberly announced—"Grandfather, you'll spoil the baby." Frequently the mother would resent the shortness of her visit and howled lustily, making it perfectly evident that there were other uninterrupted occasions of long play periods in the library. On the morning of Colonel Roosevelt's death, in making space for the change of telegrams, etc., I opened the middle side drawer of his desk and there was Cocky-locky—the little stone-rooster—fast asleep in his nest, where the baby and her illustrious grandfather had tucked him away.

He was invariably kind, as I have said, but none of his callers was allowed to take up an undue amount of his time. In the gentle and fine art of dismissing visitors without hurting their feelings—indeed, even making them feel that he was reluctant in allowing them to depart—Colonel Roosevelt was a past master. Occasionally a gurgling caller has been gently and unobtrusively led to the door and quietly and imperceptibly ushered into the outer darkness under a confirmed impression that he was tearing himself away, despite the efforts of the Colonel to detain him. On one occasion, for instance, the Colonel had two such callers, who had monopolized far too much of his time, and quietly he led them to the exit and they departed. In an instant, however, one returned and laughingly whispered to me, "The Colonel was mighty clever and diplomatic—the way he got rid of that fellow"—and to this day that man probably has not realized that he too had been dismissed.

But few of Colonel Roosevelt's visitors, however, were social callers, especially in proportion to the enormous number whom he saw almost daily at his office, or at the Harvard Club, or at Sagamore Hill. Not that Colonel Roosevelt did not love social life and friendships, as distinguished from so-called "society" life, but his public life was so tremendous that it claimed virtually all his time and attention and left little for social recreation, and none whatever in his business hours—which I am tempted to say were about twenty out of each twenty-four.

Nearly all who saw him had some message, information or suggestion which they felt would be of interest to Colonel Roosevelt, or of value to the nation and as such for his ear first, as the man who best could put it into effect. Many of his visitors, probably most of them, were disinterested personally and had no axe to grind and it was frequent manifestations of such personal disinterestedness which strengthened Colonel Roosevelt's faith in mankind and made his heart and mind so receptive that sometimes he was imposed on by hypocrites.

## An Aristocratic Democrat Who Drew No Line of Color or Creed

He knew no invidious distinction of race, religion or color, or previous condition of servitude; if a man was a real man he enjoyed Theodore Roosevelt's respect—indeed, in the fulness of his heart and the unsuspiciousness of his nature Colonel Roosevelt extended this to some who were not entitled to it. Yet never for a moment could a man become unduly familiar with him; a gentle dignity protected him at all times, and paradoxically he really was a democratic aristocrat, or an aristocratic democrat—again, use your own sequence.

Never Forgotten  
Courtesy and hospitality were among Colonel Roosevelt's cardinal virtues and never did he forget either for an instant. A pleasant word and smile went to each man and woman in his office as he entered and he addressed each by name, in friendly recognition of his or her individuality.

On my entering his study at Oyster Bay he plunged at once into business and worked unceasingly for hours at a stretch, until the last detail was finished, then, usually with only a few moments to spare, he was the cordial, hospitable host until the automobile whirled me away to the depot. Nor was this courtesy to all men and women marred by the least taint of insincerity or affectation; it was innate and instinctive, rather than coldly cultivated, and won every one with whom he came in contact. For women and children he had almost a passionate love, as such a paternal, protective love, and the women of this land lost their chevalier sans peur et sans reproche when Theodore Roosevelt passed away—a true knight of modern times.

I know that Colonel Roosevelt held to the old-fashioned chivalry that put the ideal of home life first, as the following extract from a Christmas letter to Mrs. Meloney will prove: "That every decent young man should have a family. . . . That every youngster may have a good and wise mother and every good woman a child for her arms." He also was firmly of the belief that the time had arrived for the extension of suffrage to women. He was the first national leader to advocate woman suffrage, and the Progressive National party, of which he was leader, was the first to incorporate the suffrage plank in its national platform, and he worked for it on every occasion to the end.

Mrs. Roosevelt  
While I do not know Mrs. Roosevelt's views in the matter, I have always felt that undoubtedly her great strength of character, her unusual common sense and efficient administration in the home, as well as her wonderful help in Colonel Roosevelt's work, had much to do with his judgment that women were ready for the vote.

I often wondered if another woman existed—a woman with a small proportion of the interests of Mrs. Roosevelt—who would take upon herself the task, day in and day out, week in and week out, month in and month out, without a break, of opening and sorting her husband's huge mail. I do not know of a task more tiresome or boring; that work took hours upon hours of time that otherwise she could have spent very pleasantly.

But Mrs. Roosevelt exhibited the same spirit of efficiency that was so marked in her husband. Naturally that work would have fallen upon my shoulders, as, of course, it was a physical impossibility for Colonel

Roosevelt to attempt covering that portion of his work. Mrs. Roosevelt put in one pile all of the mail she thought her husband ought to see and in another pile the mail to which I could perfectly well attend. That was a heavy and tiresome task and Mrs. Roosevelt's efficient and self-effacing methods in her many avenues of assistance to her husband proved to my satisfaction that the worthier the aid the more those principles are practised. I had the uncommon opportunity of observing and profiting by the successfully efficient, helpful and self-effacing worker in the really great wife of a great man.

And I wish to repeat here an instance of great interest to women, an instance that should be of equal interest to men. An intimate friend of the Colonel's told me on the evening of the day he was laid at rest that four gentlemen, all close to him in one way or another, at one time or another, returned to New York together from the funeral. Naturally, the whole theme of conversation was Colonel Roosevelt in life and what his death meant.

Those That Labor  
During the talk one of the gentlemen remarked that Colonel Roosevelt had told him not long before that certain politicians had come to him to induce him to replace my services. They could find no objections to me, except that I was a woman. I am told that Colonel Roosevelt on that occasion said, "Miss Stricker is the first woman secretary I have ever had. I have never had better service than she has rendered. She shall continue as my secretary."

One very human instance of Colonel Roosevelt's foresight was shown in his intense interest in the welfare of working women and children, for whose relief he always was striving. Now, years after he first showed that interest, a resolution has been introduced into Congress by Representative John Jacob Rogers, of Massachusetts, for an amendment to the United States Constitution, empowering Congress to legislate on working hours and conditions for women and children. Such legislation in the past has been pronounced unconstitutional; now steps have been taken to make Colonel Roosevelt's early work effective, and President Wilson in a talk with Mr. Rogers has approved this plan.

To Colonel Roosevelt, as to all men, it was far more pleasant to say "Yes" than "No," yet when occasion arose no one could say "No" more promptly nor more conclusively, and he said it in about one-half a syllable. Moreover, when he said "No" he meant it. In some way, however, his short negation did not carry any sting—as one man expressed it to me, "his brain seemed to be speaking rather than his heart." One did not feel hurt by the negative of the intellectual organ as he would from the organ of feeling. If ever there was any one, which I doubt, who thought Colonel Roosevelt a distant relative of the famed mollycoddle family, his opinion would have changed the moment he heard the Colonel answer "No."

### Fearlessness

Of Colonel Roosevelt's fearlessness, both physical and moral, I have not spoken and shall not speak at length; it was so evident and so well recognized as an actual component part of Theodore Roosevelt—as much a part of him and as well recognized as his celebrated smile—that to dwell on it would be superfluous. It is said that he was timid in his youth; I can only say that he must have changed tremendously as he grew to manhood. The favorite political practice of terrorism never moved him. He was ready at a moment to fight any man or collection of men, even Congress, when he thought it was in the wrong; he defied the all-powerful Republican party—he feared only God. I have heard that a couple of foolish individuals asserted that they "controlled" T. R. Of course, any one who makes such an assertion is only trying to create capital for himself, and it is too ludicrous even to think of. There was no bigotry in his cooperation, accepted or given, but no one ever controlled Theodore Roosevelt—Theodore Roosevelt, himself, always was the dominating master mind.

This is not a "tribute" to Colonel Roosevelt; it is the observation of him at closest range, in times of joy and sorrow, under every conceivable condition. To know him was to love him and to believe in him—I knew him well.